

# Pressure to ban public smoking likely to rise after EPA report

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GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

PA13

WASHINGTON — Anti-smoking advocates may have all the ammunition they need for more extensive public bans on smoking now that the Environmental Protection Agency has added secondhand cigarette smoke to its list of the most dangerous cancer-causing agents.

The EPA's much anticipated announcement Thursday puts secondhand cigarette smoke in the same category as asbestos, benzene and radon.

Blood tests on smokers and nonsmokers showed that while only 16 percent of Americans smoke, 13 percent — almost two-thirds — had a chemical in their blood that came from inhaling cigarette smoke, the EPA report said.

Smoke from other people's cigarettes is responsible for about 3,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States, according to the report.

In addition, the report estimates that between 150,000 and 300,000 children under the age of 18 may develop respiratory infections each year because of cigarette smoke, and between

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— EPA Director William Reilly



200,000 and 1 million asthmatics become sicker.

Secondhand smoke also puts healthy children at risk of developing asthma and increases the chance that they will develop fluid in their middle ears — the most common reason young children are hospitalized for surgery.

Dozens of communities already have required that no-smoking areas be set up in some public places, and numerous businesses forbid employees to smoke inside.

EPA Administrator William Reilly and Dr. Louis Sullivan, secretary of health and human services, said they hoped the Occupational Safety and Health Administration would use the EPA report as an impetus for strengthening existing smoking bans.

“We choose to do a lot of things in our lives that involve risk,” Reilly said. “But I do not believe

that we have the right to subject others to that risk.”

Sullivan said the private sector has a “significant responsibility” to make offices, restaurants and other places where workers gather safer places in which to breathe.

OSHA already is trying to decide how to regulate indoor air pollution, said OSHA spokesman Doug Fuller. “We’ve been really waiting on that EPA report.”

Other health organizations were lobbying for tough anti-smoking policies in the days before the EPA report was released.

The tobacco industry has denounced the EPA report, claiming the studies cited by the agency didn’t back up its assertion.

Reilly and Sullivan blasted back, saying the constant criticism from the tobacco industry led the EPA to work harder on writing a solid report.

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